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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 TASHKENT 000546

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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE REFLECTS
GROWING REGIONAL INTEREST IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: (A) TASHKENT 449 (B) MOSCOW 520

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Uzbekistan hosted a significant international conference focusing on regional security, particularly the situation in Afghanistan, on April 29-30. The event illustrates Uzbekistan's continuing concerns about the security situation in Afghanistan as well as growing regional interest in the issue. Several Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) officials used the forum to reinforce statements President Karimov has made, particularly regarding the "6 plus 3" proposal he presented at the NATO/EAPC summit in April. The presence of an influential Russian expert delegation and of an Afghan national security official brought to life some of the interesting regional dynamics. The two days of discussions spanned a range of issues including threat perceptions, intergovernmental cooperation to promote development and security, and ways to stabilize Afghanistan. The willingness of so many of these actors to further engage in Afghanistan is an encouraging development. This conference could foreshadow additional gatherings devoted to regional security in Uzbekistan or Afghanistan, which will provide us with opportunities to gain further insight on the perspectives of key states and organizations involved in Afghanistan as well as to shape their views on issues of importance to the United States. End summary.

¶2. (C) Uzbekistan's quasi-independent Foundation for Regional Policy and Center for Political Studies--with the support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, USAID, and the U.S. NGO Institute for New Democracies--hosted a significant international conference with approximately 200 participants entitled "Problems of Ensuring Security and Sustainable Development in Central Asia" in Tashkent April 29-30. Some participants were government officials but most made clear they were speaking

in their private capacities.

Uzbekistan's Perceived Threats, Views of Afghanistan

13. (SBU) Azamat Toshev, Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies Under the President of Uzbekistan, warned participants against getting bogged down in "geopolitical games" that result in duplication of effort, and then outlined the GOU's view of security threats. He identified the threat of nuclear proliferation as Uzbekistan's most serious concern, and also cited narcotics, crime, illegal migration, extremism, and terrorism as key threats. Toshev criticized "ineffective" international efforts in Afghanistan, asserting that the Taliban has increased its activity and drug trafficking has been on the rise. "Uzbekistan wants stability in Afghanistan," he said. He noted that Uzbekistan has advocated reconstruction and that President Karimov believes military effort alone is not the solution to the situation in Afghanistan. Toshev described the importance of additional social projects, more jobs for the people of Afghanistan, consensus among stakeholders, and Karimov's "6 plus 3" proposal. (Comment: Toshev's comments track closely with those of other GOU officials who have spoken with Embassy staff. End comment.) Toshev later bristled at a perceived accusation that Afghanistan's neighbors do nothing to combat the flow of precursor chemicals into Afghanistan for opium production, insisting that Uzbekistan interdicts these precursors and that some of these are in

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fact produced in Afghanistan.

14. (SBU) Doniyor Kurbanov, another Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies, said that only the Afghan people themselves can provide for the sustainable development of their society. He suggested improving the dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kurbanov also recommended reducing the military aspect of support to Afghanistan, citing recent commentary from President Karimov, and adopting a more political-focused approach that promotes dialogue with Afghanistan's neighbors, China, Russia, and NATO. Director of the Foundation of Regional Policy Sayfiddin Juraev agreed, stating that existing mechanisms have "exhausted themselves" and an approach too focused on the military sphere could exacerbate problems in Afghanistan, leading to "spillover" into neighboring states.

15. (SBU) Zohidilla Munavvarov, a member of Uzbekistan's Parliament and Chairman of the Imam al-Bukhari Republican Scientific and Educational Center, said that Uzbekistan values stability. Stability in Afghanistan is important to the entire Central Asian region and will facilitate the region's development, he said. Munavvarov recommended strengthening local authorities in Afghanistan in support of this objective.

The Russians Weigh In

16. (SBU) President of the Russian Foundation of Oriental Studies S. Luzyanin said that attempts to democratize Afghanistan have not been effective and that the Afghans are not accepting this. If the situation deteriorates, such "projects" should be reconsidered, he said. Luzyanin repeatedly praised the "6 plus 3" proposal as useful and an important contribution to solving the problems in Afghanistan. He also pointed out that it was important to allow Turkmenistan to get involved. Moreover, "6 plus 3" would give Russia and the United States the chance to cooperate on this issue, as well as other Central Asia security issues.

17. (C) Vitaliy Naumkin, President of Russia's Center for

Strategic and Political Studies and a well-known foreign policy expert, echoed the theme that Afghanistan represented an opportunity for the U.S. and Russia to work together on an issue of mutual interest, as had happened in the past. Naumkin told the Ambassador that he lamented the paucity of areas of current U.S.-Russia cooperation and considered Afghanistan "too important to miss" in this regard.

18. (SBU) Luzyanin said that NATO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) all have overlapping projects on Afghanistan that are perceived as being in competition with one another. He advised a deepening of cooperation between these organizations, and added that a defeat of Coalition forces and President Karzai would not help anyone.

Pakistan Comments on Afghanistan

19. (SBU) Jamshed Ayaz Khan, President of the Institute of Regional Studies in Pakistan, objected to allegations that Pakistan is playing a "double game" in the war on terrorism. Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism for 25

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years, and is committed to the war on terrorism, he said. Khan recommended further coordination and sharing of intelligence between Pakistani, Afghan, and allied forces--particularly the United States. Pakistan does not want instability in Afghanistan because this will spill over into Pakistan, he said.

Kazakhstan Rep Outlines Foreign Policy Priorities

10. (SBU) Bulat Sultanov, Director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan, said that it is important for Kazakhstan to promote ties with the major powers active in the region. Sultanov described Kazakhstan's foreign policy priorities: first, participation in the SCO and CSTO. Second, political-economic cooperation with Russia, China, and Central Asia. Third, cooperation with the United States, European Union, and NATO. Neutralizing conventional and unconventional threats requires integration, he continued. Sultanov recommended an economic union of the Central Asian countries and the establishment of intergovernmental agreements to remove tariffs and duties. Developing an integrated economic space could help to counter the threats of separatism, terrorism, and extremism, he said. He advised the creation of simplified visa regimes and the removal of barriers to the movement of capital, labor, and goods, and open borders like the European Union's. Sultanov then complained that regional cooperation with Uzbekistan has been "problematic," and suggested that Uzbekistan become a more active participant.

Turkey Aiming for Greater Role in Central Asia

11. (SBU) Suleyman Sensoy, Chairman of the Turkish Asian Center for Strategic Studies in Turkey, focused almost entirely on the European Union, which he said has become a major player in the Central Asia region. Sensoy said that Turkey wants to become one of the five "leading forces" in Central Asia, given the many linkages between them. He claimed that while others are focused on "power," Turkey is focused on "empathy" and "reason." Turkey also hopes to play a stronger role in the European Union's involvement in the region.

India a Major Player in Afghan Reconstruction

12. (SBU) Professor Jyotsna Bakshi of the Indian Council

for Cultural Relations said that India and the countries of Central Asia cannot be indifferent to the situation in Afghanistan. It is important to win the hearts and minds of Afghans to steer them away from militancy, she said. Bakshi said that India has given 800 million dollars in aid to Afghanistan, and that only the United States and Germany have provided more aid. She described a series of projects that India is pursuing, including the transfer of hundreds of vehicles, three Airbus aircraft, and other equipment to Afghanistan; the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram Road linking India to Central Asia; and the construction of a new Parliament building for Afghanistan.

"6 Plus 3?"

¶13. (SBU) Former Japanese Ambassador to Uzbekistan Akio Kawato asked why Japan and India had not been included in

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the "6 plus 3" proposal, despite the fact that both states had made significant contributions to reconstruction in Afghanistan. Deputy Director Toshev responded that Uzbekistan had studied the previous "6 plus 2" proposal, and asserted that any mechanism that does not include Afghanistan's neighbors would fail. Uzbekistan had discussed Japan's contributions, he said, and he would want to invite Japan and India to participate if possible. The issue would be taken into consideration, Toshev stated.

¶14. (SBU) Afghan Deputy National Security Advisor Mohammad Homayoun Tandar asked what role Afghanistan would play in "6 plus 3." Toshev responded that "6 plus 3" had not been pulled out of thin air--it is based on "6 plus 2" with the addition of NATO--and that there are not plans to invite the Government of Afghanistan or any of the "warring parties." Afghanistan could participate in "expert level groups" instead, he suggested. "If Uzbekistan did not propose '6 plus 3,' nothing would happen," he asserted. Toshev repeatedly challenged Tandar to suggest an alternative if he didn't like Uzbekistan's proposal. Tandar said that he had not even been given a copy of the "6 plus 3" proposal. (Note: He told us privately that he was shocked to learn that a negotiating formula had seriously been put forward without consulting the Afghan government or including it as a participant. We share his sentiment and the Ambassador floated it widely in his discussions with conference participants.)

Afghanistan's Foreign Policy

¶15. (SBU) Tandar noted that today's initiative on regional security should have been taken long ago, and that such challenges cannot be overcome in isolation. He said that Afghanistan has been a threat to the world only when other countries have interfered in its affairs, and that Afghanistan then became a breeding ground for extremism. The international community's indifference toward Afghanistan paved the way to 9/11, he said. A weak Afghanistan is not in the region's or the world's interests, he said.

¶16. (SBU) Afghanistan is interested in peaceful coexistence with Central Asia, Tandar continued. Democracy and stability in Afghanistan will lead to the same in Central Asia, he said. Tandar said that Afghanistan can play a pivotal role in the development of Central Asia, as it occupies a strategic location between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East and can serve as an important trade corridor. Afghanistan wants to connect Central Asia to the rest of the world economically, Tandar asserted, and the ring roads and highways under construction in Afghanistan are a priority. Tandar also called for the construction of additional border crossing points and Customs facilities on the borders between Afghanistan and

Central Asia.

Japan Can Play an Important Role in the Region

¶17. (SBU) Former Japanese Ambassador Kawato, one of the few participants attending in his formal foreign ministry capacity, said that diplomacy and economic development are vital in Central Asia, and Japan is well-suited to this. In addition to its role in disarmament and reconciliation (DDR), Japan has built telephone lines and modernized airports, and its work on a railway to Afghanistan will

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provide an exit to the Indian Ocean, he said. Japan's contributions through the Asian Development Bank have resulted in the construction of new highways. This kind of work helps to mitigate conflict, Kawato said. "Japan has no political ambition in Central Asia," Kawato declared, but wants Central Asian independence and economic development.

SCO and NATO Roles Examined

¶18. (SBU) Aleksey Vlasov, General Director of Russia's Information-Analytical Center for Sociopolitical Studies in Post-Soviet Countries, said that the SCO has become increasingly significant. He recommended that the SCO focus on security and economic/energy issues, such as the Energy Club. The SCO should also be involved in Afghanistan, he advised, particularly with regard to humanitarian and economic assistance. "In the mid-term, the SCO will expand," Vlasov claimed. Iran is on the agenda, and in ten to fifteen years, the SCO could become a world club, he said. Vlasov argued that the SCO should bring in as many members as possible, and suggested the development of an SCO-United States dialogue.

¶19. (SBU) NATO Liaison Officer for Central Asia and Turkey Tugay Tuncer said that NATO's involvement in Central Asia and the Caucasus has been on the rise. NATO recently formed the position of Special Representative for Central Asia and the Caucasus, and Robert Simmons now visits these regions every two to three months. NATO also created the position of NATO Central Asia and Turkey Liaison Officer. "It is clear that NATO and Central Asia share interests," Tuncer said, particularly in counterterrorism, counterproliferation, counterextremism, counternarcotics, and energy security. He noted that NATO will discuss Karimov's "6 plus 3" proposal in the coming days, and welcomes Uzbekistan's active participation in Afghanistan.

¶20. (SBU) There was considerable discussion, prodded largely by the Russians, on the prospects for cooperation between NATO and CSTO. In response, Tuncer said that cooperation with the CSTO is not a priority. "We have bilateral relations with the SCO and CSTO countries already," he noted. Tuncer said that the benefits of NATO-CSTO cooperation were unclear, and that interaction with the SCO--which includes a larger number of states--would perhaps be more useful. He also noted that there are problems with having NATO-CSTO interaction on both sides. (This prompted some grousing from the Russians and other CIS participants who wanted to see institutionalized cooperation get off the ground.)

¶21. (SBU) Yaman Yeter, NATO Information Officer for Turkey, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, described some of NATO's information policies for Central Asia. She noted that NATO conducts the Eurasian Media Forum in Almaty annually; a summer academy in Dushanbe; security seminars in Bishkek; and has sponsored a UNODC workshop in Ashgabat. She proposed using the planned destruction of melange fuel in a NATO-Uzbekistan project as a backdrop for any follow-up event to this conference.

Afghanistan Strenuously Objects to Proposed Press Release

¶22. (SBU) As the conference drew to a close, organizers circulated copies of a draft press release. Afghanistan's

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Deputy National Security Adviser Tandar took strong exception to the release, proclaiming to the participants that the Afghan delegation disagreed with some of the points it made. "We do not agree with the statement that the situation in Afghanistan is 'alarming,'" Tandar stated. He also objected to a statement that not all opportunities are being utilized in bringing peace to Afghanistan, and called for a revised version (which never materialized - no release was issued). Tandar said that the Government of Afghanistan is legitimate and democratically elected, and proposed that Afghanistan host the next such conference in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif or Kabul to show the progress that has been made. This proposal was well received.

Comment:

¶23. (C) The Uzbek proverb that if your neighbor has peace, then you will have peace, rings true. Security and stability in Afghanistan will be critical to ensuring security and stability in the region, a necessary precursor to further socioeconomic development. This conference could very well be the first in a series of similar conferences that take place in Uzbekistan (or possibly in Afghanistan) in the future. It surely underscores Tashkent's continuing concerns about the security situation in Afghanistan and the potential for "spillover" into Uzbekistan. The GOU also appears to be using it in an attempt to gain international support of President Karimov's "6 plus 3" proposal--both by devoting significant attention to the proposal during the conference and by running ringing endorsements of the proposal from conference participants in the state-run press afterwards. Fortunately, Afghan Deputy National Security Advisor Tandar told the Ambassador on May 2 that he had made headway with Uzbek academic experts in talks following the conference on persuading them of the need to include the Afghan government in any regional discussion mechanisms.

¶24. (C) Within the past few months, Tashkent has hosted--with our support--several major international conferences on themes including regional environmental problems, law enforcement and human rights, and regional security. These events are being used by the quasi-independent Uzbek think tanks sponsoring them to introduce and test out new ideas that potentially push the envelope on the GOU's thinking in general and President Karimov's in particular. They also give us unparalleled access, in this constrained authoritarian environment, to influential Uzbek officials who are clearly open to reform and new thinking. The small sums we have donated through USAID and other vehicles to support these events is money well spent.

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